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THE ENGLISH SPARROW AND ITS CONTROL

The English sparrow was first liberated in this country in 1851, having been brought from England by a bird lover who thought it would be of value in checking the caterpillars at that time destroying elm trees along the Atlantic Coast. From this and subsequent introductions it has spread all over the United States and southern Canada. The sparrow among birds, like the rat among mammals, is filthy, cunning, and destructive.

The sparrow destroys some weed seed, a point in its favor, and in some cases it has been found useful as a destroyer of injurious insects. Nestling sparrows under 10 days of age are quite insectivorous. On the other hand, much can be said against the bird. It damages small fruits and the buds and flowers of certain trees and shrubs. In the garden, it will nip off young tender vegetables as they appear above ground. It also damages wheat and other grains, whether ripening, in the shock, stack, or bin. When it is considered that a flock of 50 sparrows requires daily the equivalent of a quart of wheat, some idea is had of the annual loss caused, and the vast amount of feed consumed by these birds. Much of this is picked up in poultry yards.

A number of sparrow traps have been devised, some of which can be used to good advantage in areas where poisoning is impracticable. Drawings and descriptions of several of these traps are presented in Farmers' Bulletin 493, "The English Sparrow as a Pest," which may be obtained from field representatives of the Biological Survey on request or may be purchased from the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C., for five cents in coin.

Where poisoning is permissible and practicable the following formula may be used:

Put 1/8 ounce pulverized strychnine into 3/4 gill of hot water, add 1-1/2 teaspoonfuls of starch or wheat flour moistened with a few drops of cold water; heat, stirring constantly till the mixture thickens. Pour the hot poisoned starch over 1 quart of wheat and stir until every kernel is coated. Small-kerneled wheat sold as poultry food, if reasonably clean, is preferable to first-quality grain, being cheaper and more easily eaten by the sparrows.

Sparrows can be poisoned most easily in winter, when they are pressed for food, and campaigns against them should be conducted in places where there is no danger to domestic animals. Flat roofs, tops of fences, back yards, and unused poultry run are very favorable places to put out the poison bait. A little bait scattered on horse droppings is almost certain to be picked up. Sparrows quickly sense and avoid danger zones, however, so that the success of any campaign depends largely on the thoroughness of distribution. Scatter the bait thin. Estimate the number of birds feeding, and put out only what will be cleaned up at the first meal (a tablespoonful is a big feed). Never expose bait in piles, boxes, pans, or dishes.

CAUTION: Keep all poison containers PLAINLY LABELED and OUT OF REACH of irresponsible persons and livestock. Pick up or destroy uneaten baits.

